

## **Toughening up one's birds:**

It is 39 years ago that we joined the Sandgate Budgerigar Society and over those years I have seen many fanciers come and go. One of the most common reasons is that breeders have an outbreak of disease of some kind and lose their best birds and give it all away.

In the first ten or so years our aviary suffered great losses on two occasions thanks to an outbreak of Coccidiosis. Birds would be fine one minute and dead the next. Back in those days the older or more experienced members would not tell anyone if they were losing birds in case they wanted to sell some. They did not want to be shunned! This meant when we went looking for help, assistance was not readily available as “no one ever had sick birds”

Thank goodness times have changed and 99% of the time people speak of their experiences and the treatment they administered successfully and it is only the very narrow minded people who shun those who “come out” with their bad luck stories. Remember: everyone will have a disease at some time and if we can speak about these things and the treatments given, it can only help the fancy as a whole!

Any aviary can experience problems as a lot of diseases are “airborne” so over the years I have come to the conclusion that we must toughen up our birds so they have some resistance to problems that may occur.

I would like to state straight off that we do give Baycox as a preventative medication but only when the need arises. E.g. when we experience hot steamy stormy weather we will treat with Baycox on a preventative rate. This will usually happen about twice a year. That is the only preventative treatment we give our birds. I feel by not giving them preventative treatment the entire time, it helps toughen them up and if an outbreak occurs they have not built up immunity to the medication.

Another way I feel people are coddling their birds too much is by not allowing them access to sunlight. The birds fly all year round inside enclosed aviaries. Yes, they do get a little sunlight through windows but would you like to live like that? Birds need the vitamins from natural sunlight and frolicking in a shower of rain has never hurt any of them. Actually it tightens their feathers up very well and puts conditioning on them.

When we moved to Morayfield almost three years ago, I wanted outside flights and that wish has finally been achieved. With the help of Neville Spencer who constructed the steel frame in record time and help from our daughter's father in law, Michael Cornelius, Keith and I now have an aviary with suspended open flights.

As I stated, the frame is steel and we have put inch by half inch wire (sorry I am old fashioned, you work it out) on the sides, top and bottom with double wire on the front. We have 90% shade cloth which covers all the flight area if there is a really gusty southerly blowing or a thunderstorm is happening, we just drop the shade cloth down. Other times it is rolled up and out of the way..

For those who have not been to our home, we are on over two acres and there is a forty acre block behind us to the south and our aviary faces south so if the wind blows from that direction, you can be blown from the back to the front of the house therefore if the wind is very gusty we do protect the birds then.

The biggest remark we receive when people see our suspended flights is that we do not have a permanent protective ceiling or cover on the outside flights. Their concern is over what diseases the wild birds may give to our birds. (As I stated earlier, we are on acreage with quite a number of wild birds including cockatoos, lorikeets, galahs, magpies, storm cuckoos etc).

I spoke to Dr Mike Cannon re the possibility of our birds being infected and he told me the chances were below 1%. Reason being is that the wild birds do not remain in one area for long enough for one bird to infect all the others therefore the death rate from disease in the wild is extremely low and not a concern. We do have to be mindful of wild birds, possums etc attacking the feet of our birds but with perches and branches well away from the front of the double wired flight we feel this will not be a problem.

By allowing our birds access to the elements it boosts their vitamin D intake from the natural sunlight, it increases their activity levels and by allowing them to the outside world their feathers are becoming more dense.

We have always put native branches in our inside flights but the difference in the birds since putting the branches in the exposed flights is amazing. Instead of taking a couple of days to strip the leaves, it takes only hours now. The birds are much more active, noisier and definitely seem to have a lot more vigour. One thing to note is that the birds do not have access to their seed or soft food in the suspended flights – they must come inside to eat before roosting every evening. If you are wondering about the cost, it roughly worked out around \$450.

I know there will be breeders who disagree with the above, but the difference in the birds is all the evidence we need. We cannot thank Neville Spencer or Michael Cornelius enough for their help.



Above: Michael & Keith wiring up.

Above: Keith removing the poison from the wire

One of the most important things to note when you are placing new wire on cages is you must remove all the poison from the galvanizing by brushing down with white vinegar or really weathering the wire. Even if wire has been out in the weather for a month, I still like to vinegar it.



*Carol Gough.*